



ERIC WHITACRE'S  
**VIRTUAL SCHOOL**

## CHAPTER 7: PAINTING WITH SOUND

Student Guide – Curiosity Edition



### Introduction

This video will help you gain insight into Eric's approach for setting text in a musical composition. You will explore ideas that

will help you understand how musical sound can express aspects of a text. You will try to imagine music as you look at art and think about music.

In this video, Eric discusses the art of setting poetry to music, a concept which he describes as “finding the music that already exists within the poetry.” He describes three word-painting techniques which he uses in his music – Literal, Emotional and Conceptual.

Works referenced in this video:

- *Go, Lovely Rose*: [https://youtu.be/X7Uv9Ke0\\_vk](https://youtu.be/X7Uv9Ke0_vk)
- *When David Heard*: <https://youtu.be/AwFACXDoOiY>
- *Water Night*: <https://youtu.be/1DQQmtNuXUU>

## Words and ideas to help you stay curious

Word Painting  
Conceptual Sound Painting  
*Go, Lovely Rose*  
Emotional Sound Painting  
*When David Heard*  
Literal Sound Painting  
*Water Night*

## Discussion, Discovery and Insight

Have you ever thought about how various words might “sound” if realized in music? How might composers do this?

---

“Word Painting” in music refers to making the text come alive in sound. Do you think painters can create words through their images? Find a piece of art in your physical environment and look at it for a while. What words come to your mind?

---

Do you think music sounds like emotions feel? Explain your thoughts whether you agree or disagree.

---



## Illuminating poetry with music

1. Watch this video about word painting in popular music on YouTube: <https://youtu.be/Lm9PxXsK3gY>

Did you know about word painting before you saw this video on YouTube, or the video by Eric Whitacre? Explain your thoughts. Why do you think word painting is an important part of the experience of music?

2. Look at these two paintings:



**Cliff Walk at Pourville**

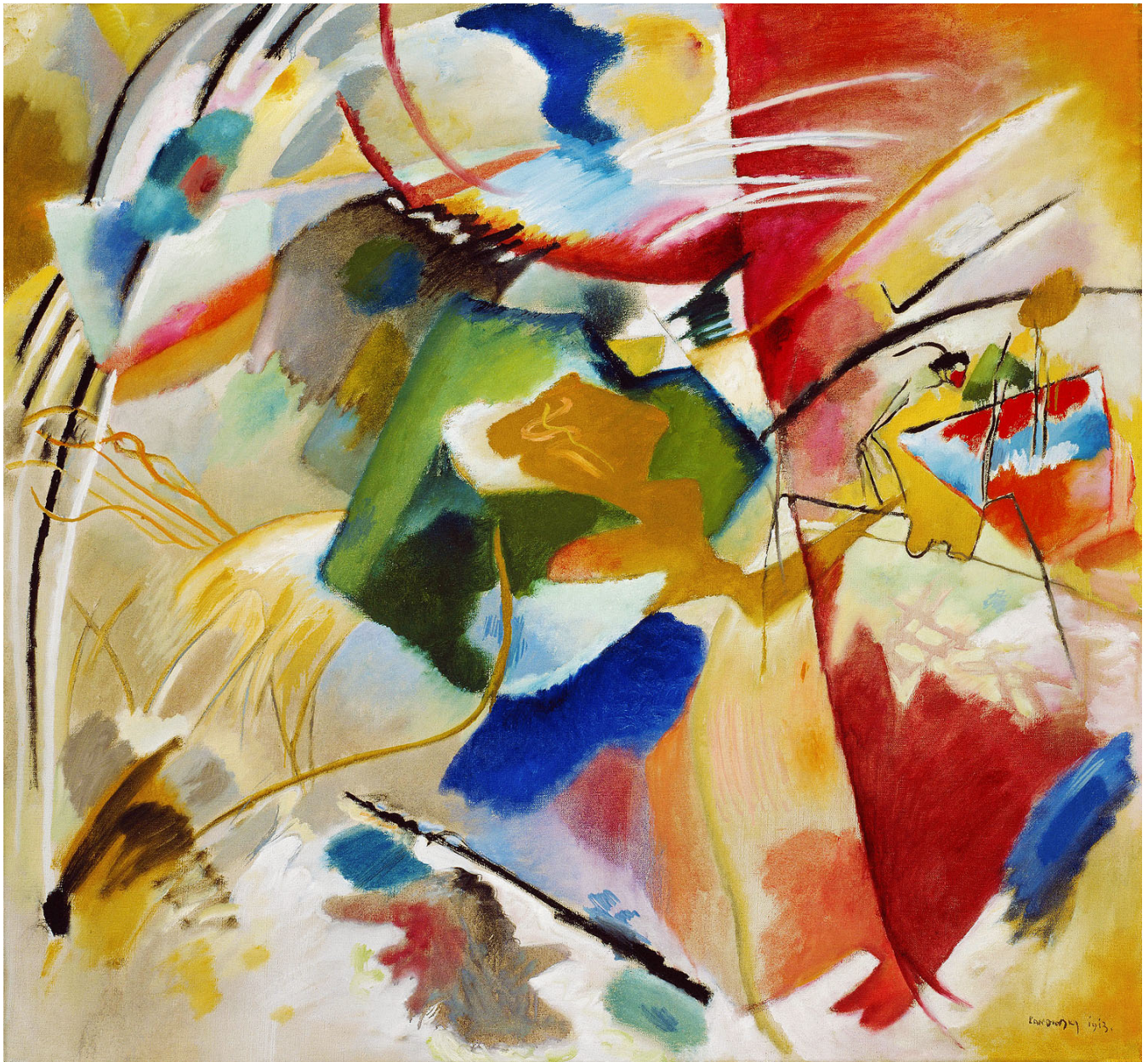
Date: 1882

Artist: Claude Monet

French, 1840-1926

Art Institute of Chicago





**Painting with Green Center**

Date: 1913

Artist: Vasily Kandinsky

French, born Russia, 1866–1944

Art Institute of Chicago

If these paintings could be realized in musical sound, what kinds of sounds might they make? Try to imagine each one, and then describe what you hear. Focus on what each painting sounds like, and what makes them different and what makes them similar.

3. Do you know a song that uses word painting in the music? What is the song, and how does it paint the text through music? Describe what you hear.

## Reflection and Insights

Did you find it easy to hear and describe word painting in music? Why, or why not? Describe your thinking. What might you do to hear word painting better?

---

Do you think music can have “word painting” without a text to draw from? To state it a different way, do you think music can create images in your mind even when there are no words being sung? Why, or why not?

---

Would you change this activity to better suit your learning style and interests? If so, describe how you would change it and why the adjustments would be better for you.

---